

Tuesday, June 11, 2013

SISD Comments for June 11, 2013 Joint Education Committee on Distressed Schools Legislation

Background

Good Afternoon my name is Dr. Richard Syrek and I am the Superintendent of the Saginaw Intermediate School District. The SISD has 13 Constituent Public School Districts and 6 Public School Academies.

I am testifying today because one of our SISD constituent districts is the Buena Vista School District. Buena Vista ran out of cash in early May and shut down school on May 7th. Over 400 students, their parents, nearly 35 staff, and the entire community experienced a tragic disruption of their lives.

After a two-week shutdown the Buena Vista School District presented a new deficit reduction plan to the Michigan Department of Education and received enough of a financial lifeline to finish the school year while meeting state mandated requirements.

Please be aware that from our perspective and after reviewing the district's financials it is unlikely the Buena Vista School District will have enough revenue to open in September.

You have handouts that provide you with a pupil accounting statement and a Saginaw ISD report showing the array of services available from the Saginaw ISD. Additionally you have an historical synopsis of the Buena Vista School District.

It is an all too common story of industrial decline, demographic change, declining enrollment, institutional dysfunction, economic shock, and unintended public policy impacts.

Sadly the tale of Buena Vista appears to be part of a series of school financial emergencies that began with Detroit and continued with Highland Park and Muskegon Heights. It was reported last week that there are many more to come.

The Saginaw ISD has been integrally involved with all phases of this crisis, has been ready to offer assistance in all ways possible, and has acted as a liaison to all concerned parties - and will continue to do so in the future.

Our commitment to the quality education of the children in our communities is unequivocal.

Distressed School Legislation Comments

I am primarily here to comment on the Distressed Schools Legislation that is currently under consideration. I want to thank the sponsors Rep. Rutledge and Rep.

Rogers for this important Bi-Partisan effort. I am also grateful for the work of the Governor's office. Our ISD was consulted as this initiative was developed.

We believe that the Distressed Schools Legislation presents big ideas we need to consider.

The Detroit, Highland Park, and Muskegon Heights Districts utilized the Emergency Manager approach to stabilize and manage debt, using locally collected millage as a method to off-load liabilities. In the cases of Highland Park and Muskegon Heights, Chartering was used as the primary way to provide education for the students and maintain a "community school". This outcome has efficiencies but will be improved upon with additional options as envisioned in the proposed Legislation

We are informed that the EM process requires a series of timeline protocols that in the case of Buena Vista may not allow for them to be reopened in time for the school year to start. This will cause additional confusion for the families of Buena Vista unless we move quickly on new Legislation.

How ISDs Can More Effectively Help Distressed School Districts

This Legislation, as reviewed, will provide a fast track for either ISDs or the MDE to transform bankrupt schools like Buena Vista using many of the same instruments that are available to an Emergency Manager. It also provides for a more localized approach, in cooperation with Local Districts and the Michigan Department of Education, for regionalization.

Many of the concepts in this bill will be helpful with the Buena Vista District if they are implemented quickly. We are currently having productive discussions with the Buena Vista Board of Education about the options, opportunities and roadblocks ahead.

We also are having ongoing conversations with surrounding school districts regarding planning and regional responsibilities.

There is no question we need revisions in the law regarding consolidation, dissolution, or devolution (i.e. K-12 to K-8 or K-5) of distressed public schools. 20th Century rules of school reorganization do not necessarily apply to the 21st Century.

For ISDs to act effectively on these topics the tools we need are bold ways to address

- **Legacy debt**
- **New district governance**
- **Staffing coordination**

Parental communications, community discussions, timing, and institutional memory are challenges, remain problematic, and probably can't be legislated.

Finally, any new legislation should have improved provisions for ISD oversight and authority early on as local districts experience financial stress. Given appropriate and balanced budgetary authority many of these crisis situations could have been more easily avoided.

If you have any questions I would be glad to address them at this time.

June 10, 2013

Dr. Richard Syrek, Superintendent
Saginaw ISD
6235 Gratiot Road
Saginaw, MI 48638

Dear Dr. Syrek:

Buena Vista School District did not claim students from the Wolverine Treatment Center for the 2012-2013 school year. The following documents were checked and verified that no students or FTE was claimed:

- The district alpha membership list
- The district's special education worksheets
- The Michigan Student Data System – which is the web site the districts use to upload a file of their students being claimed for membership.
- The DS4061/DS4120 FTE Count
- The FTE Conflict Detection list – this lists any students being claimed by more than one district.
- Section 53 verification lists – this is a list of all out of county students who are verified to be claimed by the reporting district

We performed an audit on the supporting documentation for both the Fall and Spring Count. No students from the Wolverine Treatment Center were found to be reported on any of the above resources.

The State Aid Status report is not a report that is verified through the pupil accounting office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Weiler".

Julie Weiler
Pupil Accounting & Truancy Supervisor
Saginaw ISD

Timeline: Buena Vista School District from start to now

By Bob Johnson, *The Saginaw News*

bob_johnson@mlive.com

BUENA VISTA TOWNSHIP, MI — The year was 1955, and as a growing community with a promising auto industry attracted more families, Buena Vista Township faced a problem.

Most of its eight schools educated students until sixth or eighth grade, and Saginaw School District high schools provided their high-school educations. However, Saginaw schools planned to no longer accept rural students without a joint building program.

Faced with the option of joining the Saginaw School District, a study committee decided that Buena Vista had enough resources to educate its own students. Buena Vista merged the Ricker, Leidliein, Highland Park and Star schools to form the Buena Vista School District.

“We prefer to keep the education of our children in our own hands, and we feel we have the ability and the resources to do so if we in Buena Vista Township will work together,” a committee reported in Saginaw News accounts at the time.

As of May 16, the district is shuttered, most of its staff laid off and the bank account empty. Its future remains uncertain.

Here is a school district timeline.

1955 — Saginaw Board of Education sets 1957 as the deadline to no longer accept rural students without a joint building program. A citizen committee proposes that Buena Vista merge schools into one K-12 district.

1956 — A proposal to consolidate Buena Vista schools receives a near-unanimous vote to form Buena Vista School District 9. Of 547 electors, 94 percent approved the consolidation of Ricker, Leidlein, Star and Highland Park school districts. The Indiantown, Service, Downes and Harding districts do not join. Ricker School District Superintendent Joseph Barr becomes superintendent of the new district. That same year, voters approve a \$2.5 million bond issue to build schools.

1993 — The basketball team wins the Class B state championship, defeating Muskegon Heights, 69-52.

ROTC is formed with 60 students.

1994 — After a 10-year absence, the Buena Vista band is back, led by 1987 graduate and music teacher Alvin Level.

July 1995 — T.C. Wallace accepts the top post in the Jackson, Miss., school system. Vivian Keys Brown is hired as the district's first female superintendent.

1995 — Amendment of the State School Aid Act changes school funding to a per-pupil formula and allows schools-of-choice, in which parents can send their children to other public school districts than the one in which they live. The provisions kick in in 1996.

1997 — FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Team is formed.

March 1997 — FIRST Robotics Team places 17th out of 31 teams in state competition.

April 1998 — FIRST Robotics Team places 116th out of 165 teams in national competition at Walt Disney World's Epcot Center

February 1998 — Buena Vista counts 1,745 students.

Jan. 14, 1999 — Board of Education members accept Alvin Level's resignation as band director and high-school music teacher.

Jan. 26, 1999 — Saginaw County Circuit Judge Lynda L. Heathscott sentences the 29-year-old Level to three years' probation on two counts of embezzling more than \$100 as a school district employee, one count of embezzling more than \$50 as treasurer, and one count of committing welfare fraud exceeding \$500. His wife, Churi Level, 30, receives two years' probation for embezzling more than \$100 as a school district employee and welfare fraud exceeding \$500.

November 2000 — Superintendent Vivian Keys Brown resigns under pressure from the school board. The board names former Business Manager Elmer Hollenbeck interim superintendent.

June 2001 — Elmer Hollenbeck retires as interim superintendent. The school board hires Henry L. McQueen as superintendent.

2010 — Buena Vista begins receiving \$800,000 per year for three years through the School Improvement Grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to assist with reform.

September 2010 — The Michigan Department of Education names Buena Vista High School one of the lowest performing schools across the state.

October 2010 — Student enrollment falls to 798.

Saginaw County Circuit Judge Fred L. Borchard ordered Leonard N. Williams and Alvin Jernigan Jr. off the board when sentencing them for multiple counts of felony election fraud.

January 2011 — The school board votes to close Brunkow Elementary School, 3000 S. 24th.

February 2011 — Enrollment is 761 students.

October 2011 — Enrollment is 651 students, an 18.5 percent decline from the year before, when there were 798 students — and that 2010 count showed a 17 percent enrollment drop from 2009.

August 2011 — Superintendent Sharron Jenkins Norman resigns.

August 2011-August 2012 — Former teacher Patricia Scott serves as interim superintendent.

January 2011 — Brunkow Elementary School, 3000 S. 24th, is closed.

February 2012 — No third-, sixth- and eighth-grade students are proficient in three Michigan Educational Assessment Program subjects.

Scores show no students were proficient in fourth-grade math, sixth-grade math, sixth-grade social studies and eighth-grade science and math.

June 2012 — The Wolverine Secure Treatment Center, a private juvenile detention facility, severs its education contract with the district. The state continues to supply money to teach those students, however.

July 2012 — The school board hires Superintendent Deborah Hunter-Harvill. She begins work in August. Boys basketball coach Chris Chaffer, girls basketball coach Flinnonia Hall, cheerleading coach Kimberly Nichols and Louis Jackson, a bus driver at the district since 1995, all resign.

May 14, 2013 — The Board of Education approves a skills enhancement camp in place of regular classes and submits a deficit elimination plan for a third time.

May 15, 2013 — The state approves the deficit elimination plan and releases aid to reopen Buena Vista schools for remainder of year. The skills camp idea is bagged.

May 16, 2013 — A board meeting scheduled for 6:30 p.m. could recall laid-off staff members, including 27 teachers.



Countywide Collaborative and Shared Services

Saginaw County Public School Districts



*Saginaw ISD . . .
your first and best source of solutions, always.*

Saginaw County Public School Districts

Birch Run Area Schools
Bridgeport-Spaulding Community Schools
Buena Vista School District
Carrollton Public Schools
Chesaning Union Schools
Frankenmuth School District
Freeland Community School District
Hemlock Public School District
Merrill Community Schools
School District of the City of Saginaw
Saginaw Township Community Schools
St. Charles Community Schools
Swan Valley School District

Saginaw County Charter Schools

Francis Reh Public School Academy
Saginaw Preparatory Academy
North Saginaw Charter Academy
Saginaw County Transition Academy
Saginaw Learn to Earn Academy
International Academy of Saginaw

Saginaw ISD also serves Saginaw County's non-public and private schools



CONTENTS

Collaborations between School Districts	Pages 4-5
Collaborations with the Great Lakes Bay Region & Gratiot County.....	Pages 6-8
Additional Cost Saving Efforts between School Districts.....	Page 9
Saginaw ISD Collaborative and Shared Services	Pages 10-14
Additional Technology Related Collaborations	Page 15



Saginaw Intermediate School District
Richard J. Syrek, Ed.D., Superintendent

www.sisd.cc • (989) 399-SISD (7473)

Collaborations between School Districts

■ Data Warehousing

Freeland with Midland County ESA

■ Early Childhood Special Education Programs

Birch Run
Bridgeport-Spaulding
Buena Vista
Carrollton
Frankenmuth
Freeland
Hemlock

■ Food Service Director

Freeland and Carrollton

■ Food Services

Saginaw Township provides
to Swan Valley and some
non-public schools

■ Gymnastics

Freeland and Swan Valley

Collaborations between School Districts

■ Ice Hockey Team

Freeland
Valley Lutheran
Nouvel Catholic

■ Saginaw Career Complex

All school districts in Saginaw County with
the School District of the City of Saginaw

■ Education Exploration Program

Freeland and Bullock Creek

■ Technology Director, Technology Support and Server Hosting

Hemlock and Merrill

■ Special Education Transitions Network Team

All school districts in Saginaw County
and Saginaw ISD

■ Special Education Program Cost Sharing

Carrollton	Saginaw Township
Freeland	St. Charles
Hemlock	Swan Valley
Merrill	

Collaborations with Great Lakes Bay Region and Surrounding Counties

■ Bay-Arenac ISD Career Center

Bridgeport-Spaulding
Carrollton
Frankenmuth
Freeland

■ Bay-Arenac ISD Data Warehousing

Birch Run	SD City of Saginaw
Bridgeport-Spaulding	Saginaw Township
Buena Vista	St. Charles
Carrollton	Swan Valley
Chesaning	Saginaw ISD
Hemlock	Saginaw Learn to Earn Academy
Merrill	Saginaw County Transition Academy

■ Gratiot-Isabella RESD Finance Software

Bridgeport-Spaulding

■ Great Lakes Bay Early College

Birch Run	Saginaw Township
Bridgeport-Spaulding	St. Charles
Buena Vista	Swan Valley
Frankenmuth	Learn to Earn Academy
Freeland	Out-County: Bay City, Bullock Creek,
Hemlock	AuGres Sims, Essexville-Hampton,
Merrill	Meridian, Midland, Pinconning,
SD City of Saginaw	Standish-Sterling
Bay Arenac ISD	SVSU
Midland County ESA	Delta College
Saginaw ISD	Davenport University

Collaborations with Great Lakes Bay Region and Surrounding Counties

■ Great Lakes Bay Region Instructional Services

Bay Arenac ISD
Midland County ESA
Saginaw ISD

■ Great Lakes Bay START (Statewide Autism Resources and Training) Grant

Bay Arenac ISD
Midland County ESA
Saginaw ISD

■ Great Lakes Bay Delta College Preparation Project

Bay Arenac ISD
Midland County ESA
Saginaw ISD

■ Great Start Eastern Resource Center

Saginaw ISD and
Bay, Arenac, Lapeer,
Sanilac, St. Clair and Tuscola
Counties

■ Midland County Career & Technical Education

Freeland
Hemlock
Merrill

Collaborations with Great Lakes Bay Region and Surrounding Counties

■ Technology Services

Bay Arenac ISD & Saginaw ISD - shared technician and technical training

Midland County ESA – Saginaw ISD providing administrative technical leadership services

■ Transportation Administrative & Training Support

Provided by Saginaw ISD Transportation to Bay Arenac ISD, Midland County ESA, Huron ISD and Tuscola ISD



Additional Cost Saving Efforts between School Districts

■ Contracted Food Service Provider

Bridgeport-Spaulding
and Saginaw ISD

■ District Insurance Pooling

Birch Run	Merrill
Bridgeport-Spaulding	Saginaw City
Buena Vista	Saginaw Township
Carrollton	St. Charles
Chesaning	Swan Valley
Frankenmuth	Saginaw ISD
Freeland	
Hemlock	



Saginaw ISD Collaborative and Shared Services

■ Accounts Payable Services

Carrollton
Frankenmuth

■ Birth to Five Services

All Saginaw County
School Districts

■ Bus Maintenance, Mechanic and Garage Services

Carrollton
Saginaw Township

■ Critical Incident Management Services

12 Saginaw County
School Districts*

■ Finance Management Software and Support

Birch Run	Hemlock
Buena Vista ¹	Merrill
Carrollton	St. Charles ²
Chesaning ¹	Swan Valley
Frankenmuth	<u>Out County:</u>
Freeland	Bullock Creek
	Midland County ESA
	Windover High

¹ As of 7/1/13

² As of 1/1/14

Saginaw ISD Collaborative and Shared Services

■ Great Start Collaborative

All school districts in
Saginaw County

■ Human Resource Services

Birch Run
Carrollton
Merrill
St. Charles

■ Internet Access

12 Saginaw County
School Districts*

■ Payroll Services

Carrollton
Frankenmuth
Freeland¹
Hemlock
Merrill
Midland County ESA
St. Charles
Windover High

¹ As of 7/1/13

■ Pupil Accounting Services

All Saginaw County
School Districts

Saginaw ISD Collaborative and Shared Services

■ REMC Services

All Saginaw County School Districts
Midland County ESA

■ Saginet Fiber Optic Network

12 Saginaw County
School Districts*

■ School Messenger Parent Notification System

All Saginaw County
School Districts

■ Special Education Staffing Services

All Saginaw County
School Districts

■ Special Education Transportation Services

All Saginaw County
School Districts

Saginaw ISD Collaborative and Shared Services

■ Student Management Software and Support

Bridgeport-Spaulling	Sag Learn to Earn Academy
Buena Vista ¹	Sag County Juvenile Center
Carrollton	Michael McGivney School
Chesaning ¹	
Freeland	<u>Out County:</u>
Hemlock	Bullock Creek
Merrill	Whittemore-Prescott
St. Charles	
Swan Valley	
Sag Transition Academy	¹ As of 7/1/13

■ Substitute Teacher Calling and Management System

Birch Run	Hemlock
Bridgeport-Spaulling	Merrill
Buena Vista	Saginaw City
Carrollton	St. Charles
Chesaning	Swan Valley
Freeland	
Note: PCMI is the employer and manages substitutes	

■ Technology Services

Buena Vista
Carrollton
Chesaning
Sanford Meridian
St. Charles
Swan Valley
Midland County ESA

Saginaw ISD Collaborative and Shared Services

■ Transportation Administration

Provided by Saginaw ISD to
Saginaw Township

■ West Saginaw County Special Services Area

Carrollton
Freeland
Hemlock
Merrill

Saginaw Township
St. Charles
Swan Valley

* Except Saginaw City School District



Additional Technology Related Collaborations

Additional technology related software, hardware and service collaborations that Saginaw ISD facilities on behalf of Saginaw County's 13 local school districts:

- **Antivirus software**
- **Computer lab management software**
- **Computer recycling**
- **Data back-up solutions**
- **Desktop computer and server purchasing**
- **Email system consolidation**
- **Firewall software**
- **Library automation**
- **Network monitoring**
- **Server and storage hosting**
- **Spam filter**
- **Virtual servers**
- **Web content filters**
- **Wireless management system**

For additional information on Saginaw ISD collaborative and shared services contact the Office of the Superintendent at 989.249.8701.